

NEWTON YOUTH COMMISSION Meeting
December 7, 2011 MINUTES
Location: Newton City Hall Cafeteria

Present: Joe De Vito Chair, Richard Dyer, Chris Fortunato, Matt Green, Jeff Mace, Ellen Manning, Stephan Ross, Terrance Sack, John Stauro, Kirsten Tuohy
Staff: Ruth Hoshino
Guests: Tom Pomeroy, Deb Darcy (Juvenile Probation Officer), Katie Heimer (Mass Eating Disorder Association), Susan Linn (The Newton Partnership), Zan LaMothe (West Suburban YMCA), Andrew Messinger (Charles River Recreation), Rich Catrambone (NSHS Crisis Committee), Dori Zaleznik, MD, (Health and Human Services Commissioner), Dawoun Jyung (Kennedy School Intern)
Students: Teekhon Davidoff, Zachary Eagle, Nadine Geller, Jay Sobel, Sophie Vekoler

The meeting was opened at 7:05 PM and chaired by Joe DeVito
A vote to accept the minutes of November 2, 2011 was passed.

Treasurer's Report: The budget for FY 2012 operating budget is \$2500. The revolving account balance is \$986.12.

Payment made to e-CHUG for 487.50, payment made to Improbable Players for \$700, 250.37 has been reimbursed for student meeting refreshments, payment of 110.14 made for printing marketing cards. A balance of \$1,381.99 remains.

Business:

- Mayor's Public Service Internship Program Update –

The interns are continuing with their project of narrations about teen experiences and teenage life. They anticipate pursuing this in a variety of presentation styles: live spoken words, video, and anonymous writing. They hope to capture teen issues in a real, authentic and honest way. These gathered stories of teen lives will be presented to the community in the form of a "Teen Summit" sometime in the spring or next fall.

The interns' read sample narratives to give the Youth Commission a sense of what they would be like. The authors are anonymous – the only prompt was to write something meaningful - here is a brief description of the theme of each story:

- A teen's experience of feeling awkward with socialization at school. Over time, even though it may look like progress has been made, the problem sticks – looking forward to a new start at college.
- A teen's experience and observation about bullying. You won't see kids shoved into lockers but bullying by exclusion can be just as difficult.
- A teen's experience moving to Newton from a faraway community with a small student body. The early weeks of school, trying to find the way, taught more compassion for those that appeared alone. Little things are important and approaching someone who is by themselves, can make a difference.
- A teen's observation that there is a fine line between joking and making fun of someone. It is hurtful to be the butt of jokes but sometimes you don't let on so that the teasing doesn't intensify and so that you won't be alone. You may seem happy but self-confidence is shot and the acceptance that is being sought never comes.

Getting these stories out, could spur students to look at their classmates and think that they may be the one that wrote the message and in need of support. Perhaps there could be some prevention – think first before heckling your friends. It could give a shoulder and an ear for someone who is struggling.

Ideas for forwarding this "Teen Conversation" project and an eventual "Teen Summit" are:

- At school, create a club for writing these stories (model after Rachel's Challenge groups). These stories could then be posted on the school library walls or read during homeroom each day.
- Work with schools and others in the community who work with youth to plan a summit. This was done in 2000 – 1 year after the Columbine tragedy. About 250 parents, teens and service providers (who earned continuing education credits) attended. A nationally known author on teen issues spoke, the then current social networking of “chat rooms” was demonstrated, a thirty minute video of teen conversations was shown and a recovered teen speaker who had tried to commit suicide spoke. This event sparked interest and conversation about things that go on in in the teen community that people don't know about.
- On 12/21, the interns will meet with Mayor Warren to discuss the summit ideas. He is interested in hearing from kids and is supportive of the summit concept.

The interns found a You Tube video that felt genuine and resonated on the issues that they have been discussing. The title is “*I am Jonah*” – it is a story of bullying, fear, cutting behavior, suicide contemplation, and resiliency. The Youth Commission viewed the video.

The overall project was discussed. School support is important. These stories are a great way for kids to speak up and to connect with others. There is a concern about psychiatrically worrisome narratives and how to respond when the author is anonymous. Could this exercise of having kids open up, make matters worse? Could inappropriate response be harmful? To avoid instant responses and the possibility of “ganging up”, an internet platform will not be used. By utilizing school and community resources, perhaps voluntary professional consultation groups could be formed. An idea was mentioned of tying volunteer counseling service to application to the Board of Registration of Psychologists. Building bridges to middle schools is important as many of the bullying issues are prevalent in that age group. These ideas will be presented at the two high schools threat assessment teams.

State mandates for antibullying curriculum is taking place at the high schools. It is once a month and some of the feedback to date has been that it is too repetitive and over the top. The material is new for students and teachers and will likely evolve and improve with experience and student input.

- The Improbable Players (performance and discussion workshops about substance abuse prevention) performed at Newton North High School on Wednesday, November 30th from 9:05 – 10:20AM. 80 -90 students attended and had a very positive review. They felt that the vignettes were relatable and that this type of presentation can help raise awareness about substance abuse.
- Other Discussion

Health Commissioner, Dori Zaleznik and Susan Linn of The Newton Partnership spoke about youth services in Newton and the status of the teen centers.

Youth Services - A plan to present YRBS (Youth Risk Behavior Survey) results to the community this past fall was postponed due to scheduling conflicts. But, the Health and Human Services department would like to help sponsor a youth organized summit for the community. Newton Public Schools grant funding has provided several years of work with kids and families. As the Safe Schools Healthy Students grant ends, and a successor grant for out-of-school time begins, there must be a way to sustain the gains that have been achieved. The city should support youths in a similar way to how senior citizens are supported. It is a challenging fiscal time for this concept but there should be a “city stamp” on these youth services with a youth services director that is .5 FTE – once approval steps within the city are completed. Both the mayor and the Commission are supporting this approach. This is a fledgling idea with small steps being taken. The Youth Commission is a pivotal group to help keep existing things that work really well and to say that as a community, we care about youth and families.

Teen Center - The Chestnut Street location will close 1/31/12 (because of cost and location - challenges) and a new location is currently being sought to open its doors on February 1, 2011. Eventually, it may make sense to have one teen center in a building that is centrally located and near public transportation.

Newton South is going to have a RAD (Rape Aggression Defense System) program for girls in January. The Rape Aggression Defense System is a program of realistic self-defense tactics and techniques for women. This program is because of a Newton South student who had taken this course and then successfully fought off an attacker while vacationing in the Caribbean and then formed a foundation for women's safety that would provide funding to bring the RAD system to schools.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:30 PM. **The next meeting is Wednesday, January 4, 2011 at 7 PM.**
Respectfully submitted by Ruth Hoshino